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Henry J. Beckwith
July 29, 1878
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A NARRATIVE

OF THE

EXTRAORDINARY SUFFERINGS

OF

Mr. ROBERT FORBES, his Wife, and Five Children;

DURING

An unfortunate Journey through the Wilderneſs, from *Canada* to *Kennebeck River*,

IN THE YEAR 1784:

In which THREE of their Children were ſtarved to Death.

[Taken partly from their own mouths, and partly from an imperfect journal; and publiſhed at their requeſt.]

BY *ARTHUR BRADMAN.*

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NARRATIVE, &c.

MR. ROBERT FORBES, not being a native of Canada, but having reſided there ſeveral years, was deſirous of being where he might have a more frequent opportunity of aſſociating with his own countrymen.

He and his wife had premeditated a removal to the United States of America, when falling in company with three men, by the names of Midſtaff, Pancake, and Chriſtian, they were induced, by their inſinuations, to undertake the journey by land: the ſaid Midſtaff engaging, for a certain ſum, that with the aſſiſtance of the other two, he would conduct them, in twelve days time, to the ſettlement on Kennebeck River.

Mr. Forbes' neighbours endeavoured to diſſuade him from the attempt, not only on account of the length and difficulty of the way, but becauſe there was a poſſibility of his being deſerted by his guides in the midſt of the wilderneſs.

Nevertheleſs, being determined on a removal, and having paid to Midſtaff a large ſtipulated ſum for

for that purpoſe, on the ſeventeenth day of March, A. D. one thouſand ſeven hundred and eighty-four, they entered upon this unfortunate journey.

From Nouvelle Bois, on the river Chadore, they took their departure. The men and Mrs. Forbes, (who was then pregnant), and Mr. Forbes' ſon John, a lad about thirteen years old, on ſnow ſhoes.

Their proviſions and other effects, together with four children, viz. Mary, about ſeven years; Peggy, about five; Catharine, about three; Robert, about fifteen months old, they undertook to haul on Indian ſleighs, or hand ſleds.

In this manner, but with great difficulty, they purſued their way eight days; and on the ninth, being obliged to leave the river which they had followed hitherto, and whereon they had travelled ſome part of the time, they found the country ſo broken with large and deep gullies, and ſo rough and mountainous, that they concluded it next to impoſſible to proceed any further with the ſleighs.

Here they were obliged to make a halt; and after a ſhort conſultation, having firſt erected a ſmall camp, to leave the woman and children in, they took the chief part of their proviſions, and as much of the reſt of their baggage as they were able to carry on their backs; and leaving the woman and children, about ten o'clock in the morning, ſet out in queſt of Meconick Pond, otherwiſe called Lake Chadore, expecting to return the next day. But meeting much difficulty, they did not reach the pond until the next day about three o'clock in the afternoon.

Here being much fatigued, they left their baggage; and Midſtaff having had ſome previous notice that there was an Indian reſiding not far from thence, went in queſt of him to the other ſide of the pond,

pond, where they found an old camp, without inhabitants; and there they encamped that night.

The next morning, being Sunday, the twenty-ſeventh day of March, they croſſed the pond back to where they had left their baggage. When, to the great aſtoniſhment of Mr. Forbes, his pilot and the other two, taking to themſelves the proviſions, and his other effects of any conſiderable conſequence, frankly told him, that they were determined not to return with him to his family; and that they muſt now leave him, and make the beſt of their way through to Kennebeck.

This may well be ſuppoſed to be ſhocking indeed to one who was already diſcouraged and diſheartened. "This," ſaid he, "ſtruck me to the heart, "and filled my eyes with tears; it confirmed what "my neighbours had repeatedly mentioned amongſt "their fears of what might happen to myſelf and "family."

Notwithſtanding his importunities, his moſt earneſt entreaties and ſolicitations, they would not be prevailed upon to continue any longer with him; but, leaving him only one axe, a ſmall firelock, and two loaves of bread, they departed.

With a heavy heart did this unfortunate man then make the beſt of his way back to his family; where he arrived that evening, with the ſorrowful tidings.

Here were they left in the wide wilderneſs, ſtrangers to the country, deſtitute of proviſions, and without a compaſs; eight days journey from the inhabitants in Canada, and how far from any other ſettlement they knew not; probably not leſs than one hundred and fifty miles.

The wife and ſon had laboured under the moſt terrible apprehenſions during Mr. Forbes's abſence, eſpecially ſeeing he did not return at the time appointed. Their fears had almoſt driven them to deſ-

pair;

pair; and the poor lad, a little before his father's return, had fatigued himſelf almoſt to death, having followed their tracks for ſeveral miles; and had juſt got back when his father arrived.

The next morning they were in the moſt doubtful perplexity whether to go backward or forward. Should they undertake to return to Canada, it might take them more than double the length of time in which they had got thus far, the river being then about breaking up; and in that caſe they muſt inevitably ſtarve.

When the huſband and wife were in this pitiable ſituation, gazing at each other, and tears guſhing from their eyes, their children were hanging around them, and crying bitterly, for a morſel of bread.

Upon the whole, as the before-mentioned two loaves of bread, were in the way towards Kennebeck, and as they might, peradventure, find the Indian at Meconick pond, they concluded, by the help of God, to proceed on their journey.

Accordingly they left the moſt cumberſome, though neceſſary articles, which they had now remaining, and the eldeſt daughter undertook to travel on foot with her mother, while Mr. Forbes took two of the children, and John one, upon ſleds; and thus they proceeded with as much diſpatch as poſſible.

The way, however, was rough; and they travelled but a ſhort diſtance during that day. At night, they encamped, and the next morning there came on a violent ſtorm of rain, hail, and ſnow, which continued until Wedneſday evening. In the mean while, the children were pinched with hunger and with the cold; and their cries were ſo bitterly diſtreſſing, that, leaving the mother and children in camp, the father and ſon puſhed forward with all ſpeed to the pond; but it was ſtill ſtormy, and the travelling

travelling ſo difficult, that they did not get back with the two loaves until Wedneſday evening.

Upon their return, they had not a dry thing about them, nor any dry clothes to put on. And to add to their misfortune, the fire was extinguiſhed, and they were unable to rekindle it for the whole night.

The next morning, the ſtorm being conſiderably abated, they proceeded on their journey; but the trees and buſhes being wet, they had an uncomfortable time, and did not reach the pond until Friday morning about ten o'clock.

Soon after this, to their great conſolation, they met with the beforementioned Indian, who proved to be one John Baptiſt, and with whom they had had ſome previous acquaintance in Canada.—He very hoſpitably invited them to his camp, which was at a conſiderable diſtance from the pond; and there he kindly treated them with the beſt of what his houſe afforded.

This was a camp where his wife reſided, while he followed hunting. Here they tarried until the next Monday. And the Indian having, juſt before their meeting, killed a mooſe, at a few miles diſtance, Mr. Forbes and his ſon went with their ſleds, and aſſiſted him in bringing it home.

The Indian gave them as much mooſe meat as they would undertake to carry; and agreed to pilot them to Kennebeck river.—This agreement he punctually fulfilled; and would have proceeded with them to the ſettlements, but his wife was ſo ſick that he did not dare to be any longer abſent from her. He therefore marked the way on a piece of bark, repreſenting the bends, windings, falls, and carrying places along the river.—He then wiſhed them well, and left them.

On taking leave of the Indian, they could not expreſs

preſs their gratitude. His kindneſs was beyond their expectation.—Before his departure, however, they gave him what things they had left behind, together with ſome other things of conſiderable value. And they had reaſon afterwards to wiſh that they had preſented him with more; for their loads proved ſo much too heavy for them, that they were obliged to leave by the way a large bag full of valuable articles.

They now met with almoſt inſurmountable difficulties; for in purſuing the river, their progreſs was obſtructed by craggy windfalls, rocky ledges, lofty mountains, and hideous precipices.

On the twelfth day of April, their proviſions were exhauſted; and Mrs. Forbes thought it moſt adviſable to have a camp erected, and for herſelf and the children to remain there, while her huſband and oldeſt ſon ſhould go forward to ſee whether they could find the inhabitants—apprehending that they were much nearer than they afterwards proved to be.

A camp was therefore erected, and leaving Mrs. Forbes with her four young children, Mr. Forbes and his ſon went forward with as much ſpeed as poſſible. The firſt and ſecond days, finding the ice would bear them, they travelled on the river; and would have made conſiderable progreſs, but unfortunately they miſtook their way at a very material carrying place, where, inſtead of leaving the river, and croſſing by land to the next bend, which was only twelve miles, they followed the river ſixty miles around.

A little before night, the ſecond day, they came to falls, and could go no further on the ice. They went on ſhore, and ſoon after came to a precipice where they were obliged to deſcend twenty feet almoſt perpendicularly, and at the riſque of being daſhed upon the rocks.—Night coming on, they encamped; and the next day, finding a ſhoal rocky

place

place in the river, they croſſed over to the other ſide, in hopes of finding better travelling, and a more convenient place to encamp. Here they were obliged by reaſon of ſtormy weather, to encamp for the remainder of the day.

The next day they travelled on; and perceiving the river to be almoſt clear of ice, they concluded to build a kind of raft—a thing with which they were altogether unacquainted, and by means of which they had both like to have loſt their lives.

A few days after they got on the raft, and under way about ten o'clock in the morning. The current, however, ran ſo ſwift, that they ſoon found there was no poſſibility of turning it to the ſhore. As they paſſed down the river, they ſtruck againſt a tree, which they were obliged to cut away, in order to clear the raft. When they deſcended over ripples, the water never failed of daſhing over them, ſo that they were wet continually.

About the middle of the day, the raft moving with great rapidity, ſtruck a large rock, parted one of its corners, and ſpread into a ſingle ſtring of logs. At this time they loſt their axe, and it became extremely difficult to keep upon their broken machine.

They were, from this time, driven with amazing rapidity, expecting every moment would be their laſt, until about four o'clock in the afternoon; when, falling into an eddy, they were brought up by a point of land, and both got ſafe on ſhore.

They now travelled on by land until their ſtrength was almoſt exhauſted. About the twentieth of April, they heard the report of a gun, which ſeemed to give them new life. They fired ſeveral times, but were not anſwered. Then, concluding that it might be nothing more than the falling of a tree, their

their ſpirits again ſunk within them, and they moved on with heavy hearts.

But on the evening of the twenty-ſecond, having kindled a ſmall fire upon an eminence, they were diſcovered, and kindly relieved by two hunters—Jonathan Croſby and Luke Sawyer.

It was now the tenth day ſince they left Mrs. Forbes and the children. And during this time they had eaten up all the mooſe meat which they had taken with them (it being only two or three ounces) and their moggaſons—having had nothing elſe to ſubſiſt upon.

The hunters ſupplied them with ſuch articles of nouriſhment as they had with them; and then conducted them to the ſettlements at Seven Mile Brook, a little above Norridgewalk, where they arrived in a few hours; but ſo reduced, that they were ſcarcely able to ſtand alone.

Upon their arrival, Mr. Forbes procured major Hale, William Huſton, and Ebenezer Hilton, three of the moſt ſuitable men that could be found, to go with all ſpeed to the relief of his wife and children. They ſet out immediately, and after having been gone thirteen days, returned without having been able to find them.

It was now twenty-four days from the time Mr. Forbes left them, with only one pound and an half of mooſe meat, and a pound and a half of tallow, for their ſubſiſtence: It was the general opinion, therefore, that they muſt have been dead.

Nevertheleſs, Mr. Forbes' anxiety would not permit him to reſt ſatisfied until he had procured two other perſons, Meſſrs. James M'Donald and Jonathan Ames, to go with him, and ſee whether they might not be ſtill alive. But by this time, all the low lands adjacent to the river were overflowed, which rendered the paſſing extremely difficult. For this

this reaſon, and becauſe they had no expectation of finding them alive, they could not be prevailed upon to ſet off until the waters were abated.

On the twenty-eighth day of May, they ſet out. Having travelled one day, Mr. Forbes found himſelf unable to keep up with them; and upon their telling him he could be of no ſervice, and that he might depend upon their fidelity, he conſented to return.

They proceeded on their way, and, on the ſecond day of June, arrived at the place where Mrs. Forbes and her children were left. And here, to their great aſtoniſhment, they found the mother and one of her children alive. It was now fifty days ſince they were left with nothing beſides the before mentioned mooſe meat and tallow. Nor had they any thing elſe during that whole time, excepting cold water, and the inſide bark of the fir tree. And in addition to this, they had been forty-eight days without fire.

To paint in proper colours this ſcene of diſtreſs, is altogether beyond my powers of deſcription. It muſt be left to the imagination of the reader.

On the thirty-eighth day after the departure of Mr. Forbes, the little boy expired. Catharine died the next day; and Mary lived but four days longer. This laſt child had often told her mother, they ſhould all certainly ſtarve to death; and earneſtly begged, in caſe her mother ſhould outlive her, that ſhe might be put where the wild beaſts could not devour her.

The poor woman was herſelf but juſt alive, and expected every hour to cloſe the eyes of Peggy, her only remaining child and companion. The bodies of the deceaſed children were laid out, and kept by her ſide: For ſhe was unable to bury them—having been ſo weak, for the laſt fifteen days, that ſhe had been obliged to crawl upon her hands and knees to the ſpring for water.

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The breath of life, however, was ſtill remaining in them. And the two men who came to their relief, afforded them ſuch aſſiſtance, and adminiſtered to them ſuch nouriſhment as their ſituation and circumſtances required.

On the third day of June they ſet out for home; and carried Mrs. Forbes and the child on a bier by land, and in a canoe by water, till they all ſafely arrived at Norridgewalk: where, to the ſurprize of the inhabitants, and the utter aſtoniſhment of Mr. Forbes, he was once more preſented with a living wife, and one living child.

On this occaſion, well might he adopt the language of holy DAVID—in whoſe words we ſhall now cloſe the narrative:

MY ſoul with grateful thoughts of love
Entirely is poſſeſt,
Becauſe the Lord was pleas'd to hear
The voice of my requeſt.

Since he has now his ear inclin'd,
I never will deſpair,
But ſtill, in all the ſtraits of life,
To him addreſs my prayer.

With deadly ſorrows compaſs'd round,
With painful fears oppreſs'd;
When troubles ſeiz'd my aking heart
And anguiſh rack'd my breaſt:

On God's almighty name I call'd,
And thus to him I pray'd,
"Lord, I beſeech thee ſave my ſoul,
With ſorrows quite diſmay'd."

How juſt and merciful is God;
How gracious is the Lord!
Who ſaves the feeble, and to me
Does timely help afford.

Then,

Then, free from doubtful cares, my ſoul
Reſume thy wonted reſt;
For God hath wond'rouſly to thee
His bounteous love expreſt.

When death alarm'd me, he remov'd
My dangers and my fears:
My feet from falling he ſecur'd,
And dry'd my eyes from tears.

Therefore my life's remaining years,
Which God to me ſhall lend,
Will I in praiſes to his name,
And in his ſervice ſpend.

POSTSCRIPT.

AFTER the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, at Norridgewalk, a number of gentlemen gave them a writing from under their hands; in which the relation of their unparalleled ſuffering was confirmed, and by which they were warmly recommended to the notice and charitable aſſiſtance of all Chriſtian people. This recommendation was ſigned by ſome of the firſt characters in the county of Lincoln.

Mr. Forbes and his wife, with their two ſurviving children are now living in the town of New-Glouceſter, about twenty-five miles from Portland; where, by their induſtry and economy, they have ſince been enabled to procure a very comfortable ſubſiſtence.

Mrs. Forbes, from the emaciated ſtate in which we have before deſcribed her, has now become a large and corpulent woman. And the child, of which ſhe was delivered ſoon after their arrival at Norridgewalk, is a healthy and very promiſing boy.

A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

CAPTIVITY and ESCAPE of Mrs. *Frances Scott*,

An inhabitant of Washington county, Virginia.

ON Wednesday, the 29th of June, 1785, late in the evening, a large company of armed men passed the house, on their way to Kentucky: Some of whom encamped within two miles. Mr. Scott living on a frontier part, generally made the family watchful; but on this calamitous day, after so large a body of men had passed, shortly after night he lay down in his bed, and imprudently left one of the doors of his house open —the children were all in bed, and asleep. Mrs. Scott was nearly undressed, when, to her unutterable astonishment and horror, she saw rushing in through the door that was left open, painted savages, with presented arms, raising a hideous shriek—Mr. Scott being awake, instantly jumped out of bed, but was immediately fired at: he forced his way through the middle of the enemy, and got out of the door, but fell a few paces from thence. An Indian seized Mrs. Scott, and ordered her to a particular spot, and not to move: others stabbed and cut the throats of the three youngest children in their bed. And afterwards lifted them up and dashed them down to the floor, near the mother; the eldest, a beautiful girl of eight years old, awoke, and escaped out of the bed, and ran to her parent, and with a most plaintive accent, cried, "O mamma! mamma! save me,"—the mother, in the deepest anguish of spirit, and with a flood of tears, intreated the savages to spare her child, but with a brutal fiereeness, they tomahawked and stabbed her in the mother's arms. Adjacent to Mr. Scott's dwelling house another family lived, of the name of Ball. The Indians also attacked them at the same instant they did Mr. Scott; but the door being shut, the enemy fired into the house through an opening between two logs, and killed a young lad, and then essayed to force the door open, but a surviving brother fired through the door, and the enemy desisted, and went off; the remaining part of the family ran out of the house and escaped. In Mr. Scott's house were four good rifles well loaded, belonging to people that had left it on their way to Kentucky. The Indians loaded themselves with the plunder, being

ing 13 in number, and then ſpeedily made off, and continued travelling all night; next morning their chief allotted to each man his ſhare, and detached nine of a party to ſteal horſes, from the inhabitants in Clinch. The eleventh day after Mrs. Scott's captivity, the four Indians after having her in charge, ſtopped at a place fixed on for a rendezvous, and to hunt, being now in great want of proviſions. Three went out, and the chief, being an old man, was left to take care of the priſoner, who, by this time, expreſſed a willingneſs to proceed to the Indian towns, which ſeemed to have the deſired effect of leſſening the keeper's vigilance. In the day time, as the old man was graining a deer ſkin, the captive pondering on her ſituation, and anxiouſly looking for an opportunity to make her eſcape, took the reſolution, and went to the Indian careleſsly, aſked liberty to go a ſmall diſtance to a ſtream of water, to waſh the blood off her apron, that had remained beſmeared ſince the fatal night of the murder of her little daughter. He told her in the Engliſh tongue, "Go along;" ſhe then paſſed by him, his face being in a contrary direction from that ſhe was going, and he very buſy. She after getting to the water, proceeded on without delay, made to a high barren mountain, and travelled till late in the evening, when ſhe came down into the valley, in ſearch of the track ſhe had been taken along; hoping thereby to find the way back, without the riſk of being loſt, and periſhing with hunger in uninhabited parts. On coming acroſs the valley, on the river ſide, ſuppoſed to be the eaſterly branch of the Kentucky river, ſhe obſerved in the ſand, tracks of two men, that had gone up the river, and had juſt returned. She concluded theſe to have been her purſuers, which excited emotions of gratitude and thankfulneſs to divine providence for ſo timely a deliverance. Being without any proviſions, having no kind of weapon or tool to aſſiſt her in getting any, and being almoſt deſtitute of clothing; alſo knowing, that a vaſt track of rugged high mountains intervened between where ſhe was and the inhabitants eaſtwardly, and ſhe almoſt as ignorant as a child of the method of ſteering through the woods, excited painful ſenſations. But certainly death, either by hunger or wild beaſts, ſeemed to her better than to be in the power of beings, who had excited in her mind ſuch horror. She addreſſed Heaven for protection, and taking courage, proceeded onward.

After travelling three days, ſhe nearly met with the Indians, as ſhe ſuppoſed, that had been ſent to Clinch to ſteal horſes, but providentially hearing their approach, concealed herſelf among the cane, until the enemy had paſſed. This giving a freſh alarm, and her mind being filled with conſternation, ſhe got loſt, proceeding backwards and forwards for ſeveral days; at length ſhe came to a river, that ſeemed to come from the eaſt; concluding it was Sandy river, ſhe accordingly reſolved to trace it to its ſource, which is adjacent to Clinch ſettlement. After proceeding up the ſame ſeveral days, ſhe came where the river runs through a great laurel mountain, where is a prodigious water fall, and numerous high craggy cliffs along the water edge; that way ſeemed impaſſable, the mountain ſteep and difficult: However, our mournful traveller concluded that the latter way was the beſt. She therefore aſcended for ſome time, but coming to a range of inacceſſible rocks, ſhe turned her courſe towards the foot of the mountain and the river ſide; after getting into a deep gulley, and paſſing over ſeveral high ſteep rocks, ſhe reached the river ſide, where, to her inexpreſſible affliction, ſhe found that a perpendicular rock, or rather one that hung over, of 15 or 20 feet high, formed the bank. Here a ſolemn pauſe took place, ſhe eſſayed a return; but the height of the ſteps and rocks ſhe had deſcended over, prevented her.

She

She then returned to the edge of the precipice, and viewed the bottom of it, as the certain ſpot to end all her troubles, or remain on the top to pine away in hunger, or be devoured by wild beaſts. After ſerious meditation and devout exerciſes, ſhe determined on leaping from the height, and accordingly jumped off. Although the place ſhe had to alight was covered with uneven rocks, not a bone was broken; but being exceedingly ſtunned with the fall, ſhe remained unable to proceed for ſome time. The dry ſeaſon cauſed the river to be ſhallow—ſhe travelled in it, and where ſhe could, by its edge, until ſhe got through the mountain, which ſhe concluded was ſeveral miles. After this, as ſhe was travelling along the bank of the river, a venomous ſnake bit her on the ancle; ſhe had ſtrength to kill it; and knowing its kind, concluded that death muſt ſoon overtake her. By this time Mrs. Scott was reduced to a mere ſkeleton, with fatigue, hunger, and grief; probably this ſtate of her body was the means of preſerving her from the effects of the poiſon; be that as it may, ſo it was, that very little pain ſucceeded the bite, and what little ſwelling there was, it fell into her feet. Our wanderer now left the river, and after proceeding a good diſtance, ſhe came to where the valley parted into two, each leading a different courſe.—Here a painful ſuſpenſe again took place; a forlorn creature, almoſt exhauſted, and certain if ſhe was far led out of the way, that ſhe would never ſee a human creature. During this doubt, a beautiful bird paſſed cloſe by her, fluttering along the ground, and went out of ſight up one of the vallies. This drew her attention, and, whilſt conſidering what it might mean, another bird of the ſame appearance, in like manner fluttered paſt her, and took the ſame valley the former had done. This determined her choice of her way; and in two days, which was on the 11th day of Auguſt, ſhe reached the ſettlements at Clinch, called New-Garden; whereas (ſhe is ſince informed by woodmen) had ſhe taken the other valley, it would have led back towards the Ohio. Mrs. Scott related that the Indians told her, that the party was compoſed of four different nations, two of whom ſhe thinks they named Delawares and Mingoes.

She further relates, that, during her wandering from the 10th of July to the 11th of Auguſt, ſhe had no other ſubſiſtence but chewing and ſwallowing the juice of young cane ſtalks, ſaſſafras leaves, and ſome other plants ſhe did not know the name of; that, on her journey, ſhe ſaw buffaloes, elks, deer, and frequently bears and wolves; not one of which, although ſome of them paſſed very near her, offered her any harm. One day a bear came near her, with a young fawn in his mouth, and on diſcovering her, he dropped his prey and ran off. Hunger prompted her to go and take the fleſh, and eat it; but on reflection, ſhe deſiſted, thinking that the bear might return and devour her; beſides, ſhe had an averſion to taſte raw fleſh.——Mrs. Scott continues in a low ſtate of health, and remains inconſolable for the loſs of her family, particularly bewailing the cruel death of her little daughter.

FINIS.